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A Bizarre Interpretation Of Taiwan Issue

Whenever the United States considers a move that will weaken its ties to the Nationalist Chinese regime on Taiwan, intelligence agencies are asked to predict what the Taiwanese reaction is likely to be. The recent decision against the sale of advanced fighter planes to Taiwan was no exception.

In all the sheaves of top-secret analyses, no suggestion is more bizarre than this one, which keeps bobbing up: a deteriorating relationship with the United States will compel Taiwan to seek closer ties with the Soviet Union.

In the hardball game of international power alignment, no possibility is too far-fetched, of course. Ideology often takes a back seat to cold reality, and "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." The mutual Soviet-Taiwanese enemy, of course, is the People's Republic of China.

Here's how CIA and Pentagon experts weigh the idea of a Taipei-Moscow rapprochement, according to secret intelligence studies shown to my associate Dale Van Atta:

"For one thing, Taipei probably believes that the costs of maintain-

ing and upgrading modern air and naval defense systems would be too heavy to bear for long without help," one report said. Without U.S. support, Taiwan may turn to Moscow.

"Taipei may presume that the Soviet Union would welcome such a role," the report continues. "Access to Taiwan's air fields and ports would provide a convenient way station on the long trek from Vladivostok to the Indian Ocean."

"A close relationship between Taiwan and the U.S.S.R. also would prevent both the PRC [mainland China] and Japan from acquiring Taiwan and would underscore Soviet status as a Pacific power while simultaneously offsetting Chinese, Japanese and U.S. influence in the region."

The report adds: "In Taiwan's view, a Soviet protector could fill the island's defense requirements. Taipei planners know that, of all [mainland China's] neighbors, the U.S.S.R. is the most ready and willing to undertake military action against Peking." All it would take, the analysis speculates, is a verbal assurance that if Peking invades Taiwan the Soviets would counter the move by an attack on China from Siberia.

On the debit side, Taiwan recognizes that "such a relationship . . . would be fraught with risks and uncertainties." These dangers are spelled out in the secret studies:

• "Taipei would fear that Moscow could demand a high price for its

protection in terms of military installations and perhaps trade arrangements disadvantageous to Taiwan."

• "Taipei would also have to evaluate the risk of becoming involved in a Sino-Soviet war . . ."

• On the other hand, the Taiwan government would have to weigh the chances of being rudely jilted if Moscow and Peking were suddenly to kiss and make up.

• As for the Soviets' willingness to strike a deal with Taiwan, the analysts warned that the Soviets "probably would be reluctant to burn their bridges completely [with the mainland Chinese], while at the same time adding another irritant to U.S.-Soviet relations."

• And finally, "linking with the Soviets in any fashion would alienate Taipei from Washington and damage hopes for continuing close ties with the U.S."

Despite all these disadvantages, and Taiwanese insistence that they're not interested in a Soviet connection, the U.S. analysts don't rule it out completely if the United States continues to weaken its support for Taiwan.

A Defense Intelligence Agency report suggests that Taiwan is doing a little horse-trading. The Taiwanese have engaged in "circumspect flirtation with Moscow . . . more in search of leverage in its relations with the U.S. than in preparation for taking out a Soviet option."